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L E T T E R

T O A N

AMERICAN PLANTER,

F R O M

H I S F R I E N D

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L O N D O N.

L O N D O N:

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M. DCC. LXXXI.



Dear Sir,

THE NEW YORK
at
your Estab.
afforded me
pleasure to that I felt
with the interesting
Adventures, since you will tell
tell your final settlement what
your Lord of Promise; which, like
old, you say, abundantly with all the
necessities as well as Necessaries of

L E T T E R

TO AN

AMERICAN PLANTER, &c.

Dear Sir,

***** THE News of your safe Arrival
* T * at ———, where you found all
* * your Family in perfect Health,
***** afforded me a Pleasure little in-
ferior to that I felt, when you favoured me
with the interesting Detail of your several
Adventures, since you first left England,
all your final Settlement in what you call
your *Land of Promise*; which, like that of
old, you say, abounds with all the Conve-
niencies as well as Necessaries of Life; and
A 2 where



where Divine Providence hath blessed you with a comfortable Habitation, an extensive and fruitful Estate, amply stocked with what constitutes the principal Riches of your Province, viz. a large Number of healthful robust *Negroes*—These you may remember were the Subject of Conversation one Evening, which we spent *tête à tête*. You sympathized with me in a generous Compassion for the hard and severe Lot of this unhappy Part of the human Species: But when I proposed to you to endeavour to mitigate the Rigour of their Situation, by introducing them to the Knowledge of the Gospel of CHRIST, and of those glorious Rewards, which our Religion promiseth to ALL, Slaves, as well as Masters, who faithfully embrace it, and with humble Resignation submit to the Divine Appointments; I say, when I proposed that you should have your Slaves instructed in the Christian Religion, as the best Mean to reconcile them to their state of Servitude, and support them under it; you started several Objections, and urged them in such a manner as to discover, that how much soever you might approve of the Piety and Benevolence of the Proposal, you seemed to think it almost impossible to carry it into Execution. Since
 your

your Departure, I have employed my Thoughts on this Subject, and I hope with dispassionate Candour; and as I am persuaded of the Uprightness and Integrity of your Intentions, and that it is your earnest Desire to behave yourself in every Relation you bear to others, as a good Christian ought to do, I need make no Apology for communicating to you my Sentiments. I shall state the REASONS you then urged against attempting the Conversion of the *Negroes*; and hope you will not be displeased if I expostulate with you on the Subject, with the Freedom of one who sincerely wisheth your Welfare and Happiness in both Worlds.

THE FIRST, and principal Difficulty, which you alledged against attempting to instruct ADULT *Negroes* imported, was their strong Attachment to the idolatrous Rites and Practices of their own Country.

Now, deep-rooted Impressions, and long contracted Habits, of whatever kind, are, I grant, hard to be effaced; but not so hard as should make us presume, that it is to no Purpose to attempt it. By diligent and prudent Application, much, we know, hath been done this Way; and, by the same Means, much, I am sure, may be done again. And with regard to the Point you

6. *A Letter to an American Planter,*

particularly mentioned, permit me to ask you a few Questions :

Were not all Nations, except the Jews, very great Idolaters, at the Time the Apostles were sent to propagate the Gospel among them ?

Did the Idolatry of the Heathens hinder the Apostles from endeavouring to convert them to Christianity ?

Have not many Heathens, accustomed to Pagan Rites, and to such vicious and licentious Practices as Christianity forbids, been converted to our holy Religion from time to time, without any other Help than *the sincere* WORD OF GOD, and the good Example of those who recommended it ?

And may not you reasonably hope, if you are as zealous in using the proper Means as you ought to be, that your Endeavours to convert the *Negroes* may be proportionably successful ; since you have no Reason to doubt, but that the Divine Grace will be equally assisting to you, as it was to your Predecessors in the same good Work ?

But perhaps you will say, “ the *Negroes* “ are utter Strangers to our Language, and “ we to theirs.” But,

Do not many of the *Negroes*, who are grown Persons when imported, even of themselves

themselves attain so much of our Language, as to enable them to understand, and be understood in Things which concern the ordinary Business of Life? And if so,

May they not with a little Instruction, easily attain so much further Knowledge of it, as to enable them to understand the Things which concern the Welfare of their Souls? At least,

Might not some *few*, who are more capable and serious than the rest, having first learnt our Language, be taught the Principles of our Religion by themselves; and then be appointed to convey Instruction to their Fellow-Slaves of lower Capacities, in their own Language?

Would you not pursue this Method, if you found it necessary to your own worldly Advantage?

Is there then not greater Reason for doing so, in order to promote the Glory of God, and the Salvation of Souls?

Do you take Care of the Bodies of the *Negroes* for your own Sake, and ought you not to take Care of their Souls for CHRIST his Sake?

What Sentence do you think CHRIST will pass upon you at the last Day, should you be not only remiss in forwarding, but even

active in obstructing, the Salvation of those Souls for whom He shed his precious Blood?

What, alas! would have become of us, through all Eternity, if CHRIST had discovered no greater Compassion for *our* Souls than we do for those of *others*?

Though our Bodies are distinguished by a Diversity of Colour from the *Negroes*; Doth this Diversity make any real Abatement to the Worth of their Souls? Are they not Transcripts of the same Divine Original? Have they not the same Capacities for Immortality with our own? And did not the same Redeemer who died for us, die for them also?

“Who made you to differ from them?” Might not the same God who made you White, and them Black, if it had seemed good unto him, have made you Black, and them White? Have made them Masters, and you their Slave? Why then do you usurp a Superiority which by Nature you have no Right to? Why do you glory over your poor Brother, because the common Father of you both hath given to him a different Complexion? Why do you withhold, and even deny his Right to those Privileges and Blessings, which the Father hath given in common to both?

For

For what Reason was it that God in his Providence, made you Master of so many Slaves ! Was it merely that you might employ their Bodies in doing your Drudgery ? Surely you cannot think so : You cannot conceive so unworthily of the common Father of All, who is “just and righteous in all his Ways, and no respecter of Persons.” God intended Mercy to them as well as Kindness to you ; that both you and they might be instrumental in promoting each other’s Felicity : that whilst they, by the Labour of the Body, promote your temporal Interest, you in Return, might promote the spiritual and eternal Welfare of their precious and immortal Souls.

Do you correct your Slave if he is negligent, or idle in doing his daily Task ? And will not the great Lover of Souls severely punish you, if you suffer any whom he hath intrusted to your Care, to perish through your Negligence ?

The Advantage at present, Sir, is greatly in your favour : You are now their Lord, and may treat them with Kindness and Gentleness, or with Rigour and Severity : You may teach them “the good and the right Way,” or you may let them con-

tinue in their original Ignorance and Idolatry : O, be persuaded, my dear Friend, to let your Slaves reap that Benefit from their Situation, which God intended they should reap ; if you do not, the Difference will be fatally inverted hereafter, when “ they shall be comforted, and you tormented.”

That you may escape this Reverse, which if once it takes place, will last for ever, be always attentive to your Duty.—Be careful, extremely careful, to administer to your Slaves the Comfort of knowing what good Things God hath laid up in Store for them, if they act a right Part in that trying State of Labour, in which he hath placed them under you. Here you may inform them, that in the early Ages of Christianity, many Slaves, when converted from Heathenism, were destined to undergo, and patiently endured the most severe Usage and cruel Treatment from their unbelieving Masters, who often persecuted them even to Death, on account of the Religion they professed. And then you may observe how happily different their Situation is at present, when they are kindly invited by their Masters, to believe in CHRIST ; and, provided they behave suitably

suitably to their Profession, may reasonably hope to be treated with Tenderness and Humanity by them in this World; and to be rewarded by CHRIST, the Saviour of all that believe, with Glory and Happiness in the World to come. By thus alleviating their hard Lot, and rendering it more easy and supportable to them, by the cheering Prospect of a better Life, you will gain great Advantage to yourself; for it is the natural Effect of such Instruction, to turn the Eye-service of Slaves into the conscientious Diligence of Servants. And it is likewise worthy of your Consideration, that by this Means, a Branch of Commerce, which carries with it a Reflection upon Human Nature, and is founded on the Misery and Wretchedness of a large Part of Mankind, will become subservient to the Purposes of Benevolence and the Cause of Religion, from which it will derive the Blessings of Providence in Return.

But the Difficulties you alledge against instructing the ADULT Negroes imported, cannot be urged against the religious instruction of the *Negroe* Children, who are born and bred among you. They certainly may easily be trained up, like all other Children,

Children, to learn any Language, and particularly our own; and may with the same Ease and Facility that other Children are, be instructed in the Principles of our holy Religion. And must not their Owners and Governors be absolutely inexcusable, if they do not sincerely endeavour to “bring them up in the Nurture and Admonition of the LORD.”

But perhaps you will farther say, that no Time can be spared from the daily Labour of the *Negroes*, to instruct them in the Christian Religion. But is not this in effect, to say, that you value a little worldly Advantage, more than the Glory of God, and the Salvation of Souls? But sure I am, a little Time may be found for this pious purpose, without much Abatement of their daily Labour. Might not the Slaves be called together in an Evening, two or three Times a Week, on the LORD's Day in particular, to be instructed in the Principles of Religion, by a Person, duly qualified for the Purpose? Suppose you, Sir, whose Slaves are numerous, were at some small Expence for this Purpose. Would this be any more than a just Return to the poor Slaves, for the ample Profits you derive from their Labours?

bours? If they make you Partakers of their temporal Things, (of their Strength and Spirits, and even of their Offspring) ought not you to make them Partakers of your spiritual Things, though it should abate somewhat of your Profit from their Labours? And is it not very probable that the Slaves would abundantly repay your Christian Compassion and Kindness to them, by a greater degree of Honesty, Fidelity, and Diligence in your Service? Not to mention that God may then, in an especial manner “bless your Basket and
“your Store, the Increase of your Kine
“and of your Flocks, and prosper you in
“all that you set your Hands unto.”

But should the Difficulties you mention, or any others, discourage you from attempting to have your *Negroes* instructed in this or any other Way, yet I trust you will give them all possible Encouragement to attend public Worship at Church on the Lord's Day, because this may be a Mean, thro' the Blessing of God, of instilling serious Thoughts into their Minds, and of exciting in them an earnest Desire to know what they must do to be saved.

You know very well that God hath given one Day in Seven to be a Day of Rest, not
only

only to Man, but to Beasts; that it is a Day appointed by him for the Improvement of the Soul, as well as the Refreshment of the Body; and that it is the Duty of Masters to take care that all Persons under their Authority keep this Day holy, and employ it to the pious and wise Purposes for which God, our great Lord and Master, intended it; and therefore I cannot suppose that you will even permit, or connive at your *Negroes* spending this Day in an improper manner; either in the ridiculous Recreations usual with them in their own Country, or in labouring on that Day to provide themselves with any Necessaries or Conveniencies of Life: much less can I suppose that you will lay them under the disagreeable Necessity of doing the latter; which I am told is the Practice of some cruel hard-hearted Owners of Slaves: But where is the Religion of these Men? Do they call themselves Christians? Let them be called Infidels, Heathens, Barbarians, or any thing but Christians: for such Persons are a Disgrace to the Christian Name: I had almost said to Human Nature.

And now, Sir, I can think of no other Objection to the Instruction of the *Negroes* in the Christian Faith, unless you will plead further.

further, that this Instruction being in order to Baptism, you cannot approve of it, because as some of the Planters have said, "Since we have got to baptizing them, they are become insolent, idle, Runaways; and what not? And that they never were so 'till Baptism came in Fashion amongst them."

But, Sir, you may as well suppose *Darkness* to spring from *Light*, and Evil to be the necessary Effect of Good, as say that the Misconduct of some of the baptized *Negroes* is the Consequence of Baptism, or of the Instruction previous to it. Good Instructions and good Principles may produce good Effects, but cannot produce bad ones: If some Blacks misbehave after Baptism, do not you see many Whites no less guilty? You may as truly say that all the Robberies, Burglaries, and other Crimes committed within the Bills of Mortality, are the Consequences of Baptism, as say that Baptism, with the Instruction previous to it, renders the *Negroes* in the Plantations insolent, idle, Runaways, &c.

That some baptized *Negroes* have misbehaved, I will not deny; but this is not to be charged to the Account of Baptism, but to the bad Policy, Imprudence, perhaps Irreligion,

religion, of their Masters. The Unwillingness of the Planters in general to permit their *Negroes* to be baptized, hath led these poor ignorant Creatures to imagine that some very great civil Privileges or Immunities are annexed to Baptism; that after it, either they are no longer Slaves, or that their Master's Property in them wholly ceases, or at least that his Authority to punish their Faults is greatly lessened: Under the Influence of some such Mistake, the *Negroes* are very solicitous to be baptized; and after they are baptized, is it any wonder that some of them should prove idle, insolent, and Runaways? In so doing they only act agreeably to the false Principles and wrong Notions their Masters imprudent and impolitic Conduct hath infused into them. Let the Planters reverse their Conduct in this Particular, and make it a constant Rule to have all their *Negroes* duly instructed in the Christian Faith, and afterwards baptized; and I will venture to prophesy, that the Sentiments of the *Negroes* with regard to Baptism will soon be rectified: The Forwardness of Masters to bring them to this Solemnity will soon effectually convince them, that no civil Privileges or Immunities are annexed to it, and their

Baptism

Baptism will not be attended with those bad Consequences which have been hitherto complained of.

It is now very well understood by the Planters in general, that neither Christianity nor the Laws of our Country have annexed any civil Privileges or Immunities to Christian Baptism; and therefore it will be entirely the Planters Fault if they encourage in their Slaves the contrary Opinion, by discovering any Unwillingness to have them instructed and baptized. If they are idle or disorderly afterwards, Christianity doth not deprive you of any Degrees of Strictness and Severity that fairly appear to be necessary for the preserving Subjection and good Government. But still you are to remember that the general Law, both of Humanity and of the Gospel, is Kindness, Gentleness, and Compassion to all Mankind, of what Nation or Condition soever they be; and we are to make the Exercise of these amiable Virtues our Choice and Desire, and to have recourse to Severity only when Necessity requires. Of this Necessity you yourselves remain the Judges as much after they receive Baptism as before: So that You can be in no Danger by the Change; and as to Them, the greatest Hardships

Hardships which the most severe Master can inflict upon them, are not to be compared to the Cruelty of keeping them in a State of Heathenism, and thereby depriving them of the means of Salvation, as reached forth to *them* as well as to *you*, in the Gospel of CHRIST. Besides, is it not the Want of Religion in the governed, that makes Severity at all necessary to keep Mankind in due Order and Subjection to Government? Were the Minds of the Blacks duly impressed with a lively Apprehension of the great and tremendous Sanctions of the Gospel, everlasting Happiness and eternal Misery; the Hope and Fear of these would, no Doubt, much contribute to make them tractable, orderly and submissive, and in a great measure save the Masters the Trouble as well as Pain of inflicting corporal Punishment.

But perhaps after all you may say, that some of the Blacks imported seem to be so entirely corrupted and depraved, and to have so much inbred Malice and Wickedness of Heart in their very Nature, to be so much sunk into Ignorance, Ferocity and Brutality, that every Attempt to humanize, soften and instruct them, is full as absurd as it is impracticable. But is it possible to
suppose

suppose that any of the Blacks can be more corrupt and degenerate than some of the Nations we read of in History ; who, notwithstanding, were converted to Christianity, and became eminent for their Virtues and good Qualities ? I need not mention Particulars ; your own Reading will suggest to you Variety of Instances ; which may shew that the Conversion of the most vicious and abandoned is not impossible. What hath been done may be done again ; and therefore it is your Duty to make the Attempt ; “ what is impossible with Men, “ is possible with God ; ” and you are sure of the Divine Assistance co-operating with your pious Endeavours. Our blessed LORD hath promised to be with all those, even to the End of the World, who sincerely endeavour to propagate his Religion. If the Task is difficult, was it not *dangerous* as well as difficult to the first Preachers of Christianity ? Yet they were not discouraged from attempting the Conversion of the World, either by Difficulty or Danger, but resolutely persevered, and wonderfully succeeded. You, Sir, run no Hazard by such an Attempt ; your Slaves are in Subjection, and can offer no Violence to you for endeavouring to reform them.

You,

You must not think to excuse yourself from this Business by saying, the Propagation of Religion and the Salvation of Souls is the peculiar Duty of the Clergy only. Every private Christian is bound in Gratitude and Duty to communicate to others the Way of Salvation, which God hath made known to him; what would you say of a Person who was possessed of an infallible Cure of an epidemic Disorder, should he keep it intirely to himself, when Numbers of his own Family and Neighbourhood were sorely afflicted; and say, that it was not his, but the Physician's Business to cure such Disorders? What would you say farther, if this Remedy was made known to him on this express Condition, that he should freely communicate it to all who were afflicted? Would you not call him ungrateful, hard-hearted, cruel, and what not? Now such a Disorder is human Corruption, and such a Remedy is the Gospel.

What a Reproach, what an Infamy and Disgrace is it to Christians to suffer Thousands of Heathens and Idolaters to dwell among them, and even to make a Part of their Household and Family, without attempting their Conversion? But how aggravated

gravated must the Guilt of Englishmen be in this Respect, who, through the Blessing of God, have the Light of the Gospel shining in Purity and Splendor among them. Our Rivals the *French* are, I am told, extremely attentive to the religious Instruction of their *Negroes*. As we are fond of copying their Follies, let us not be ashamed of imitating their Virtues; rather let our Zeal in propogating the true Knowledge of the Gospel among our *Negroes* as much exceed theirs, in Proportion as the Blessings spiritual and temporal bestowed upon us by our gracious God, are superior to those given to them.

If you rightly consider Things, you will be so far from looking upon the religious Instruction of your *Negroes* as a burdensome Task, that you will acknowledge it as a great and happy Opportunity put into your Hands by Almighty God, for promoting and advancing his Glory. The Authority which he hath given you over such a Number of heathen Idolaters, carries in it a manifest Obligation on your Part to endeavour, by all the Weight of your Influence, to convert them from their Errors, and bring them into the Kingdom of his dear Son. This Authority is a
Talent

Talent committed to your Trust, and a very weighty and important one it is. Do not then, I beseech you, wrap it up in a Napkin, but study to improve it to its utmost Extent, agreeably to the Intention of your great Lord and Master.

You are to consider yourself as a Steward; "whom the LORD hath made Ruler over his Household." Be therefore "wise and faithful." Be attentive to their Wants, "and give them Meat," spiritual as well as carnal, "in due and proper Season." If the Labour is great, the Reward will be proportionable. For "blessed, eternally blessed, will be that Steward whom his LORD when he cometh shall find so doing."

To shew us the Importance and Necessity of doing it, and to keep on our Minds a constant Sense of that Importance and Necessity, our Saviour hath inserted a kind of Remembrance of it in that Form of Prayer which he hath graciously taught us. This Form, I presume you repeat daily. But with what Consistency can you pretend to pray to God that "his Kingdom may come;" that the Gospel may be propogated, unbelieving Nations converted, and the Number of Saints augmented, whilst

whilst you yourself wilfully suffer the greatest Part of your own Family and Household to continue Strangers to this blessed Kingdom, in profound Ignorance of the Means of Grace here, and of Glory hereafter? Doth not your Practice fully contradict your Prayers? Again, Do you not pray that "his Will may be done on Earth as it is in Heaven?" But how is it possible for your Slaves to do the Will of God, unless they know it? And how can they know it, unless you will take Care that they be duly and properly instructed in it?

Your Neglect to do this, is a plain Indication that you are insincere in your Devotions; and you may as easily reconcile Contradictions, make Light and Darkeness dwell together, as you can shew that such a Neglect of the spiritual Welfare of your *Negroes*, is consistent with the Meaning and Purport of your Prayers.

My Zeal for your temporal and eternal Welfare, hath carried me much farther than I at first intended. If I have trespassed on your Patience, you must impute it to my earnest Desire that you may, in the great Day of Account, be numbered among those "who have turned many to Righteousness,"

24 *A Letter to an American, &c.,*

“Righteousness,” and be honoured with that distinguishing Reward which shall be allotted to all such,—a Crown of Glory eternal in the Heavens.

Believe me to be,

Dear S I R,

Your affectionate Wellwisher,



And sincere Friend.

Oct. 10, 1770.

[Signature]

[Signature]